

February 18, 2015

Madame Chairwoman and members of the committee, my name is Barbara Rush and I live at 720 Holter here in Helena.

I am a retired teacher of 30 years from the Helena School District. I stand here today in support of HB 377. I have been following school reform for sometime. I have watched as good schools have deteriorated and parents have fled to homeschooling and movements for school choice. Many of the "experts" who will testify here today are the very same "experts" who stood for Goals 2000 twenty years ago. Goals 2000 has been an utter disaster and now they will support a new federally supported program, Common Core. The truth is that our schools were doing better under Carnegie Standards that were not federalized or politicized. Carnegie Standards had no programs, no money and no agendas behind them. They simply required a certain amount of the basic subjects to be covered in order for a student to graduate.

As I have followed school reform in Montana it has become apparent to me that our Montana Board of Public Education has lost its way and is no longer following the mandate that was set out for it in our Montana Constitution. In CONSTITUTION AND COMMENTARY it states more than one time that the intent of creating this new board was to protect local control. The board was supposed to put a check on the Office of Public Instruction. In reality, the Montana Board of Public Education is actually taking direction from the Office of Public Instruction instead of the other way around.

The State Board, under the direction of the Office of Public Instruction, voted to mandate Common Core to all school districts in the state. A board that is only given supervisory duties took upon itself to mandate what amounts to curriculum across the state to every school district. The public was not properly noticed and the fiduciary responsibilities this would burden our school districts with was not properly researched and noted before the mandate.

Across the country Common Core is running into difficulty because of its poor curriculum, testing fiascos, and data collection. Of the twenty-two states that originally signed onto the PARC assessments fourteen have now opted out. Just about every state that originally signed onto Common Core has backed out or has legislation to accomplish that end.

HB377 will allow an Accreditation Standards Council the authority to establish standards and remove Montana from this federal fiasco. It will also allow school districts to make their own determinations. Common Core is copyrighted and only allows school districts to add 15% but does not allow them to change anything. Common Core collects private data on our children and has had school districts, such as Helena, change privacy policy allowing anyone doing research to acquire data on students without parental permission.

Common Core is very politicized having uninformed children in English classes question our founding documents. By the time students are seniors 70% of what they read in English class will be informative articles rather than narrative literature, causing our English classes to debate current issues rather than to read the classics. These standards were not piloted or tested before they were implemented and are nothing but a huge experiment using our children here in Montana as guinea pigs. Backers of Common Core will say that these are 21st century standards and that they will make students college and career ready, but they have no proof of any such outcomes.

I urge you to pass HB377 and remove Montana from this federal debacle that is burdening our schools which are already strapped for money and burdening our teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers are spending days and days away from their students just to train and learn the scripts for exactly how they now must teach and then to collaborate with other teachers to make sure they are all teaching the same things in the same ways at the same times. None of this makes sense for our schools. Please put the authority over our schools back where it should be, with our elected representatives rather than the appointed Montana State Board of Education.

Thank You,

Barbara Rush
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Helena